



**PLANNING COMMISSION  
MINUTES  
TUESDAY, APRIL 14, 2015**

**CALL TO ORDER**

A regular meeting of the La Quinta Planning Commission was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Chairperson Wright.

**PRESENT:** Commissioners Bettencourt, Blum, Fitzpatrick, Wilkinson, and Chairperson Wright

**ABSENT:** None

**STAFF PRESENT:** Community Development Director Les Johnson, Deputy City Attorney Kathy Jensen, Principal Engineer Bryan McKinney, Principal Planner Wally Nesbit, and Executive Assistant Monika Radeva

Commissioner Bettencourt led the Commission in the Pledge of Allegiance.

**PUBLIC COMMENT** – None

**CONFIRMATION OF AGENDA** – Confirmed

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

**Motion** – A motion was made and seconded by Commissioners Blum/Bettencourt to approve the Planning Commission Minutes of February 19, 2015, as submitted. Motion passed unanimously.

**PUBLIC HEARINGS**

1. Environmental Assessment 2014-1001, Specific Plan 2014-1001, Tentative Parcel Map 2014-1001 (TPM 36745), Tentative Tract Map (TTM 36744), and Site Development Permit 2014-1003 submitted by Griffin Ranch Investors LP proposing to subdivide approximately 40 acres into 78 single-family lots, a 3,600 square-foot community building with pool, patio, and barbeque areas, and expand the existing 2.1-acre pond to a 6-acre lake with several boating slips/dock areas. Project: Estates at Griffin Lake. CEQA: a Mitigated Negative Declaration of Environmental Impact and associated Mitigation Monitoring Program have been

prepared for consideration. Location: south side of Avenue 54, half a mile east of Madison Street.

Principal Planner Wally Nesbit presented the information contained in the staff report, a copy of which is on file in the Community Development Department.

Planning Commissioners asked questions of staff and commented regarding a meeting of the Coachella Valley Water District Board meeting held earlier in the day.

Chairperson Wright declared the PUBLIC HEARING OPEN at 7:39 p.m.

Public Speaker: Mr. Paul DePalatis, AICP, Director of Planning Services with MSA Consulting, Inc., Palm Desert, CA – introduced himself, gave a detailed presentation of the project and its history, and answered the Commission's questions with regards to the proposed six-acre lake. He identified that the proposed lake would result in a 73% reduction of potable water use, is in compliance with Coachella Valley Water District's regulations and in line with Governor Brown's April 1 Executive Order Regarding Mandatory Statewide 25% Reduction in Potable Water Use.

Public Speaker: Mr. Mark Majer, Applicant and Director with MDM Investment Group, Newport Beach, CA – introduced himself, expressed his gratitude to the Commission and staff, and provided a brief description of the project, noting that the lake serves as non-potable water reservoir for the development. He encouraged the Commission to consider the potable water savings and that the project has been in the works for two years.

Vice Chair Wilkinson asked what measures have been put in place to address dust control. Mr. DePalatis said the project will have a PM10 plan and dust control measures will be used during grading and construction as needed.

Vice Chair Wilkinson said there was no mentioning of a deceleration lane or stacking distance requirements on Avenue 54. Principal Engineer McKinney answered that the City's Traffic Engineer had reviewed the project and the number of trips generated based on the proposed number of homes did not warrant the need for a deceleration lane. Mr. Major stated that the applicant's Traffic Engineer had performed a very detail analysis of this issue and a determination was made, along with staff, that there would not be a need for a deceleration lane.

Public Speaker: Mr. Ronald Gregory, A.S.L.A., President with RGA Landscape Architects, Inc., Palm Desert, CA – introduced himself, provided an overview of

the proposed landscaping for the project and noted that it had to be designed to not only meet the landscape requirements of CVWD and the City, but also the State.

Commissioner Bettencourt asked if the hypothetical 88-lot subdivision would meet the design standards in the Specific Plan and require the proposed annual 20,807,100 gallons for landscaping irrigation alone. Mr. DePalatis said the number is very rough and the project was designed to meet the Specific Plan requirements. Mr. Gergory noted that the subdivision is being designed to meet the standards and calculations as provided by the State to the local water agency.

Commissioner Bettencourt said that the provided documentation did not include any official statement or analysis from CVWD supporting the applicant's hypothetical design and he thought it would be beneficial to the Commission to have a high-ranking CVWD Official attend the next Commission meeting that would be able to testify to the validity of the applicant's statements. He further asked that the Commission be provided an alternative 88-lot subdivision design proposal for comparison purposes.

Commissioner Blum inquired as to the lot level and optional second story feature on Plan 1. Mr. DePalatis answered his questions.

Public Speaker: Ms. Katie Barrows, La Quinta resident, CA – introduced herself and said she is in support of staff's recommendation to continue the item to allow for a closer look at the proposed water conservation. She noted that the discussion and comments indicate a great effort was put into the design of this project and the applicant was going above and beyond in some areas, but it was not clear that they had done that with regards to water conservation. The Governor's Order currently addresses only potable water, but other aspects of our water use might be included. It would be most responsible of the Commission to recommend a continuance and give staff and the Commission a better chance to study the project and to answer some of the questions brought up during the Commission's discussion. Mrs. Barrows referenced water statistics recently published in The Desert Sun. She stated that the project would use 33 million gallons of water per year with the lake, and 28 million gallons per year without the lake. She said that we are in a seven-year drought and need to be more concerned with water conversation. She pointed out that canal water does have many applications, it is used for agriculture and to recharge our water supply which she viewed were more important uses than the lake. Mrs. Barrows said water is water and asked that a fair comparison be provided in the staff report with regards to the water use as it currently only addressed the savings realized in potable water.

Public Speaker: Ms. Linda Williams, President of the La Quinta Historical Society and La Quinta resident, CA – introduced herself and complimented the applicant on the beautiful design of the project. She said this was not a historic property, however, it has a large celebrity identity and as pointed out in the staff report mostly equestrian. She had hoped that the estate could be used as a center for conferences much like the Sunnylands, Annenberg Estate, in Rancho Mirage. She noted that recently the Coachella Valley received very negative publicity nationally, with regards to its water usage. The City should have an eye towards how the approval of this project would be perceived. She stated she read CVWD's report from this morning and one of the things that struck her was that it requested private pumpers, canal water, and non-potable water uses to abide by the imposed restrictions as well. She said that other water uses will also be affected in the future and she would like to see La Quinta take some measured steps.

Public Speaker: Mr. Ronald Serasio, Palm Desert resident, CA – introduced himself and said he was currently looking into purchasing a home in La Quinta. He stated from the discussion tonight there were couple of issues that were brought up, one being the preservation of water and that water is water. He said that there were a lot of questions brought up during tonight's discussion that needed to be further looked at before a decision was made.

Public Speaker: Mr. Edward Armendarez, La Quinta resident, CA – introduced himself and said Mrs. Barrows had already covered most of the points he wanted to bring up. He noted that the water consumption numbers provided in the staff report were a bit conspicuous. He stated this was a beautiful development that would be a great addition to the community; however, he questioned that it was a model use of water.

Public Speaker: Mrs. Elaine Reynolds, La Quinta resident, CA – introduced herself and said that Merv Griffin was very actively involved with the art foundation. She stated she did not feel that the Merv Griffin estate was the appropriate location for the proposed project. She said she would like to see the estate preserved as originally built to maintain its historic value much like Thomas Jefferson's home.

Mr. Major noted that although there wasn't any form of historic designation of the estate, the development was designed in a manner that would preserve the original estate, including the structural integrity of the stables' woodwork, which would remain intact, that the stables would simply be renovated and repositioned which would result in a minor reduction in size. He stated the design allowed for the preservation of the cultural identity of the property.

Motion – A motion was made and seconded by Commissioners Bettencourt/Fitzpatrick to continue Public Hearing Item No. 1 to allow staff and the applicant to provide the following:

- Provide CVWD's approval of the proposed supply network
- Attendance of a CVWD Official at the Commission's next meeting
- Provide a draft HOA maintenance and care budget for the project
- A sketch plan providing comparison of this project to an alternative design

AYES: Commissioners Bettencourt and Fitzpatrick. NOES: Commissioners Blum, Wilkinson and Wright. ABSENT: None. ABSTAIN: None.

Motion failed due to the lack of quorum.

Chairperson Wright declared the PUBLIC HEARING CLOSED at 8:34 p.m.

Motion – A motion was made and seconded by Commissioners Wilkinson/Blum to adopt Resolution 2015-005 recommending to the City Council approval a Mitigated Negative Declaration of Environmental Impact and associated Mitigation Monitoring Program for Environmental Assessment 2014-1001, Specific Plan 2014-1001, Amendment No. 1 (SP 2004-074), Tentative Parcel Map 2014-1001 (TPM 36745), Tentative Tract Map 2014-1001 (TTM 36744) and Site Development Permit 2014-1003 as submitted with staff's recommendations and the revision of the following Conditions of Approval as identified in the memorandum dated April 14, 2015:

*Tentative Tract Map 2014-1001 (TTM 36744) – Exhibit D*

- 49. Minimize the differential in building pad elevations of perimeter lots and building pad elevations in adjacent developments. Building pad elevations of perimeter lots have been allowed by the City Engineer to differ by more than the standard one foot in elevation from adjacent developments due to the unique site conditions of this project and the effort by the applicant to lower the site as much as possible. Meeting the one foot standard would impose an unreasonable hardship upon the applicant.*
- 50. Minimize the differential in elevations of lots within this development and elevations in adjoining developments. The differences in elevation between the adjoining properties and the lots within this development as shown on the TTM and the grading plan will be allowed by the City Engineer due to the unique site conditions of this project and the effort by the applicant to lower the site as much as possible. Further lowering of the site would impose an unreasonable hardship upon the applicant.*

*Site Development Permit 2014-1003 – Exhibit E*

44. *Minimize the differential in building pad elevations of perimeter lots and building pad elevations in adjacent developments. Building pad elevations of perimeter lots have been allowed by the City Engineer to differ by more than the standard one foot in elevation from adjacent developments due to the unique site conditions of this project and the effort by the applicant to lower the site as much as possible. Meeting the one foot standard would impose an unreasonable hardship upon the applicant.*
45. *Minimize the differential in elevations of lots within this development and elevations in adjoining developments. The differences in elevation between the adjoining properties and the lots within this development as shown on the TTM and the grading plan will be allowed by the City Engineer due to the unique site conditions of this project and the effort by the applicant to lower the site as much as possible. Further lowering of the site would impose an unreasonable hardship upon the applicant.*

AYES: Commissioners Blum, Wilkinson, and Wright. NOES: Commissioners Bettencourt and Fitzpatrick. ABSENT: None. ABSTAIN: None.

Motion passed.

**BUSINESS SESSION** – None

**CORRESPONDENCE AND WRITTEN MATERIAL** – None

**COMMISSIONER ITEMS**

1. Report on City Council meetings of March 3, 17, and April 7, 2015.
2. Commissioner Blum is scheduled to attend the April 21, 2015, City Council meeting.

**DIRECTOR'S ITEMS**

1. Electronic distribution of the Planning Commission packet.
2. Planning Commissioners Academy – March 4-6, 2015, at the Fairmont Newport Beach Hotel.
3. Medical Marijuana Dispensaries and Group Homes.

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business, it was moved and seconded by Commissioners Bettencourt/Fitzpatrick to adjourn this meeting at 9:09 p.m. Motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Monika Radeva', written in a cursive style.

MONIKA RADEVA, Executive Assistant  
City of La Quinta, California

